

Personality Traits in the Characterisation of the Main Characters in “Watoto wa Mamantilie” and “Daladala Kutoka Mbagala: A Psychoanalytic and Narrative Analysis”

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Abstract

This paper examines the representation of character traits through the fictionalisation of protagonists in Emmanuel Mbogo’s Watoto wa Mamant’ilie and Mussa Shakinyashi’s Daladala Kutoka Mbagala. By analysing how protagonists are constructed, the study provides insight into the cultural narratives and societal values reflected in contemporary Tanzanian literature. The research adopts a qualitative approach and employs a hybrid analytical framework that integrates Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory and Puckett’s Narrative Theory. These theoretical lenses enable a detailed examination of how characters’ personalities are expressed, narrated, and performed within the selected texts. The study is grounded in the Constructivist Paradigm, an interdisciplinary theoretical perspective widely recognised in education, psychology, sociology, and epistemology. This paradigm holds that individuals construct meaning and perceive reality through personal experiences, beliefs, interpretations, and social interactions. Guided by this framework, the study relies on close textual reading as its primary method of data analysis, focusing on narrative description, dialogue, behaviour, and social interaction to interpret the development of key characters. The analysis reveals that Peter is portrayed as a psychologically complex character whose personality is marked by sociability, empathy, analytical thinking, and creative adaptability, reflecting resilience shaped by social marginalisation and personal loss. In contrast, Fikara emerges as a more authoritative and force-driven figure, whose personality is defined by assertiveness and controlled emotional expression, suggesting a limited yet distinct rhetorical dominance within the narrative. Together, these portrayals demonstrate how characterisation functions as a critical literary device for revealing personality types, power relations, and social identity, thereby enriching the interpretative depth of African literary analysis.

Keywords: Psychological complexity, cultural identity, social power relations.

1 Introduction

Literature, expressed through novels, plays, and poems, mirrors life and communicates values, beliefs, and social realities (Ngesa et al., 2015). Through literary texts, authors engage with human experience and social conditions, enabling readers to reflect on their own realities. This article examines the novels Watoto wa Mamant’ilie and Daladala Kutoka Mbagala, focusing on characterisation as a pedagogical tool that reveals the personalities and unique traits of key

figures. Characters provide depth to narratives and foster emotional engagement between texts and readers.

Protagonists often embody their authors' social commentary (Bwelele, 2016). Their traits influence actions, decisions, and relationships, making personality a critical subject in literary interpretation (Charters, 2011; Poetry, 2014). Through well-crafted characters, authors communicate moral lessons, social criticism, and cultural values, allowing readers to engage critically with the text.

Characterisation, the depiction of a character's appearance, thoughts, behaviour, and inner life, is a fundamental literary device for creating psychological depth and emotional impact. As noted by Clemence (2015), effective characterisation conveys complex emotions such as guilt, love, fear, and jealousy, thereby strengthening the connection between writer and reader. Understanding these traits enables readers to trace how characters shape plot development and reinforce central themes (Feisal, 2011).

Characterisation, defined as the representation and development of a character, conveys identity through background, gestures, values, and lived experiences. Fadhil (2014) emphasises its role in revealing personal traits, while Reams (2015) identifies two principal approaches: direct and indirect characterisation. Direct characterisation explicitly describes a character's traits, commonly through narration, whereas indirect characterisation reveals personality through dialogue, actions, and behaviour, requiring greater reader interpretation. This distinction is further elaborated by Burroway (2000) and Kimambo (2015), who argue that both approaches are essential for crafting realistic characters and revealing their psychological states. Together, these techniques help explain how personality traits shape narrative structure and deepen thematic meaning.

Despite extensive scholarship on characterisation, limited attention has been given to its pedagogical significance in contemporary Swahili novels, particularly in *Watoto wa Mamant'ilie* and *Daladala Kutoka Mbagala*. This study seeks to address this gap by analysing how characterisation functions as a tool for conveying moral, social, and educational messages in the selected texts. Specifically, the study aims to examine the methods of characterisation employed in the novels and to explore how these methods contribute to character development, thematic construction, and reader engagement.

2 Literature review

Scholarly studies consistently acknowledge characterisation as a central element in literary analysis, through which authors reveal personality, motivation, and moral orientation. Characterisation enables readers to engage emotionally with fictional figures while interpreting broader social meanings embedded in texts. According to Charters (2011), characters function as vehicles for thematic development, with their psychological traits shaping narrative progression. Similarly, Reams (2015) argues that effective characterisation allows readers to infer complex emotions and inner conflicts, thereby enriching textual interpretation.

Researchers distinguish between direct and indirect characterisation as principal methods for constructing literary personalities. Direct characterisation involves explicit descriptions of characters' traits, while indirect characterisation reveals personality through dialogue, behaviour, and interaction (Burroway, 2000; Kimambo, 2015). Herman's narrative schema further emphasises the role of actions and speech in uncovering psychological depth. Despite extensive discussion of these techniques, limited attention has been given to how they function

pedagogically, particularly in the portrayal of child protagonists within African literary contexts.

Tanzanian literature has attracted considerable scholarly attention, particularly in relation to themes of postcolonial identity, social injustice, and urban poverty. Studies frequently examine how literature reflects socio-economic inequalities, gender relations, and the challenges of urbanisation. However, the psychological and emotional dimensions of childhood within urban settings are often marginalised. The representation of urban children in Tanzanian novels tends to prioritise social conditions over internal struggles, resulting in a limited exploration of emotional complexity.

Consequently, issues such as poverty, family responsibility, gender expectations, and marginalisation are frequently discussed at a thematic level, without sufficient attention to their psychological impact on child characters. This oversight restricts a deeper understanding of how literature both reflects and critiques the lived experiences of impoverished urban children. Scholars have therefore called for more nuanced analyses that foreground children's inner lives and emotional resilience within fictional narratives.

Psychoanalytic criticism, particularly Freud's theory, has been widely applied in literary studies to uncover unconscious motivations, inner conflicts, and behavioural patterns of characters. Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego offer valuable tools for analysing how characters respond to trauma, deprivation, and desire. In parallel, narrative theory, as advanced by scholars such as Puckett, highlights the influence of narrative voice, perspective, and focalisation in shaping readers' understanding of character development.

Although these theoretical frameworks have been applied extensively in Western literary studies, their use in analysing Tanzanian and Swahili novels, especially those centred on child protagonists, remains limited. The integration of psychoanalytic and narrative approaches provides an opportunity to explore both the internal psychological dimensions of characters and the narrative strategies through which these dimensions are communicated to readers.

While existing studies have contributed significantly to understanding themes of poverty and social injustice in Tanzanian literature, there remains a notable gap in psychoanalytical and narrative analyses of characterisation, particularly concerning child protagonists. Few studies systematically examine how personality traits are constructed and how narratorial strategies influence readers' perceptions of children's psychological development. This study addresses this gap by employing Freud's psychoanalytic theory and Puckett's narrative theory to analyse the protagonists in *Watoto wa Mamant'ilie* and *Daladala Kutoka Mbagala*, thereby contributing new insights into characterisation in East African fiction.

3 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive textual analysis within a multiple-case research design, focusing on two Tanzanian novels: *Watoto wa Mamant'ilie* by Emmanuel Mbogo and *Daladala Kutoka Mbagala* by Mussa Shakinyashi. The multiple-case design enables a comparative examination of character construction across two distinct yet thematically related literary texts, allowing for both within-text and cross-text analysis of character development in contemporary Tanzanian socio-economic contexts. The two novels were purposefully selected based on clearly defined criteria aligned with the objectives of the study. Both texts are situated within urban and/or peri-urban Tanzanian settings, foregrounding lived experiences shaped by poverty, inequality, and social struggle. The novels prominently feature child and adolescent protagonists, whose psychological and social development provides fertile ground for analysing

personality formation and inner conflict. The works were published within a contemporary period of Tanzanian literature, reflecting current socio-economic realities and cultural discourses. The selection ensures authorial contrast: Mbogo represents an established literary voice whose work is endorsed by the Ministry of Education for its pedagogical and thematic value, while Shakinyashi represents an emerging writer whose narrative innovation offers alternative modes of character portrayal. Together, these criteria justify the inclusion of WM and DKM as complementary cases for in-depth qualitative analysis.

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive textual analysis within a multiple-case research design, focusing on two Tanzanian novels: *Watoto wa Mamant'ilie* by Emmanuel Mbogo and *Daladala Kutoka Mbagala* by Mussa Shakinyashi. The multiple-case design enables a systematic comparison of character construction across two distinct yet thematically related literary texts, allowing for both within-text and cross-text analysis of personality development in contemporary Tanzanian socio-economic contexts.

The two novels were purposefully selected based on clearly defined criteria aligned with the objectives of the study. Both texts are situated in urban and/or peri-urban Tanzanian settings and foreground lived experiences shaped by poverty, inequality, and social struggle. Each novel centres on child and/or adolescent protagonists, whose psychological and social development provides a productive basis for analysing personality formation, inner conflict, and resilience. The novels were published within a contemporary period of Tanzanian literature, reflecting current socio-cultural realities. The selection ensures authorial contrast: Mbogo represents an established literary voice whose work is endorsed by the Ministry of Education for its pedagogical and thematic value, while Shakinyashi represents an emerging writer whose narrative experimentation offers alternative modes of character portrayal.

Data analysis followed a theory-informed qualitative coding process combining deductive and inductive elements. The initial coding categories, such as Influence, Sociability, Emotional Control, Aggression, and Moral Reasoning, were theory-driven, derived from personality trait theory and Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory (1890), particularly concepts related to repression, motivation, and inner conflict. These categories were applied during close and repeated readings of narrative episodes, dialogue, and descriptive passages. At the same time, the analysis remained open to inductive refinement, allowing sub-categories and contextual nuances to emerge from the texts. Puckett's Narrative Theory (2016) guided the interpretation of how character traits are mediated through narrative perspective and focalisation. The analytical process involved three stages: independent analysis of each novel, systematic cross-text comparison, and theoretical interpretation of findings through psychoanalytic and narrative lenses.

To ensure validity in the research, the study employed triangulation through different theoretical lenses: Freud's psychoanalysis, Puckett's narrative theory, and Herman's characterisation model. Additionally, thematic codes and interpretations were reviewed for reliability through peer debriefing with academic colleagues in literature and psychoanalysis. Multiple readings of the novels were conducted to enhance interpretative validity and maintain internal consistency of trait indicators. The potential for interpretive bias was mitigated through reflexive memoing and explicit documentation of coding decisions.

This study does not involve human participants; however, ethical guidelines were still considered. The scrapping tool respects the authors' work by providing proper citations for any referenced text. Literary analyses do not misrepresent the authors' views or characters. The researcher remains aware of the possibility of positional bias and practices reflexivity

throughout the process. Additionally, when classroom use of the texts is mentioned, this demonstrates awareness of their pedagogical value within Tanzanian educational environments.

4 Findings

The findings of the study were organised into two thematic areas that emerged through systematic coding of the selected novels: character personality and the depiction of leading characters. These themes were identified by constructing a coding framework in which key elements of character behaviour, dialogue, and narrative description were assigned specific codes. Segments of text corresponding to these codes were then grouped, allowing patterns of personality traits and character roles to be established. The use of tables enabled the clear presentation of these patterns. Table 1 summarises the number of main characters in each novel. In contrast, Table 2 displays the frequency of personality traits under the categories ‘Relationships with Others’, ‘Thinking Styles and Emotions’, and ‘Feelings Expressed in the Narrative’. Table 3 applies Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory and Puckett’s Narrative Theory to illustrate the psychological forces that shape the motivations and behaviours of the primary characters.

4.1 Characterisation and constitution of the main characters

The description and development of Swahili fictional protagonists are crucial for narrative growth and the projection of broader social contexts. Table 1 presents the main characters of Emmanuel Mbogo’s ‘WM’ and Mussa Shakinyashi’s ‘DKM’, based on the distribution and salience of main, minor, and group-referenced characters.

Table 1: Personality characterisation and development of the main characters

Code	Main Characters (Ordered by Name)	Total Main Characters	Total Minor Characters	Group-Mentioned Characters	Total Characters
WM	Peter, Mamant’ilie, Zita, Kulwa	4 (9%)	28 (65%)	11 (26%)	43 (100%)
DKM	Fikara	1 (6%)	13 (72%)	4 (22%)	18 (100%)

Table 1 summarises the form of characterisation evident in the selected texts, detailing the distribution and occurrence of main and minor characters in Emmanuel Mbogo’s ‘WM’ and Mussa Shakinyashi’s ‘DKM’. ‘WM’ features four protagonists, constituting 9% of the characters. The minor characters are divided into two sub-groups: named characters (28, or 65% of all characters) and unnamed characters (11, similar to 26%), totalling 43 characters in the narrative.

To clarify, we are not referring to names such as Peter or Zita; rather, we are expressing the concept of a name that serves merely as a label for a character. Common nouns, on the other hand, are used more generically to indicate a group of people rather than individuals; for example, readers may encounter villagers or passengers, who collectively represent the people in the story. In ‘DKM’ the characterisation departs from the traditional model, featuring one character (Fikara) who constitutes 6% of the characters. There are 13 minor characters characterised by proper nouns (72%), and 4 identified by common nouns (22%), resulting in a total of 18 minor characters.

These figures show that both novels construct a hierarchical character system, distinguishing the protagonists from other figures who are referred to without proper names. This narrative choice aligns with established narratological principles that position central characters as key determinants of plot development and thematic progression (Genette, 1980; Rimmon-Kenan, 2002). The use of proper nouns for main characters strengthens their individuality and psychological depth, enabling readers to form more explicit mental images and emotional connections. In contrast, the reliance on common nouns for minor or collective characters situates them primarily within their social functions, reinforcing their supportive role in the narrative. Recent studies on characterisation in African literature (e.g., Okolo, 2018; Kamau & Oduor, 2021) also emphasise that such differentiation enables cultural and social critique.

From a narrative-technique perspective, this distribution highlights how the authors strategically use characterisation to manage complexity and scope. Mbogo's ensemble cast in 'WM' facilitates a more communal and intricate representation of social relations and interactions. In contrast, Shekinyashi's narrower focus in 'DKM' emphasises one protagonist's experience, creating a greater sense of intimacy and psychological depth. As noted by Abrams (1999), these choices in characterisation affect how readers engage with and understand the text, influencing narrative perspective and emotional response. Furthermore, current scholarship maintains that this juxtaposition between individual and collective characterisation enhances thematic resonance, including themes prevalent in postcolonial narratives (Njoroge, 2020).

In summary, characterisation is an effective literary tool in these novels, significantly contributing to the construction of complex, vibrant individuals who are essential components of the overarching story. The individual characteristics and actions of the protagonists position readers emotionally and intellectually within the narratives, while minor characters and group references help place these protagonists within their social and cultural contexts. This multifaceted characterisation not only enriches the storytelling but also demonstrates the authors' keen appreciation for human and social complexity.

4.2 Frequency of personality traits

Table 2 below presents the categorisation and frequency of personality traits as manifested in the behaviours, speech, and narrative roles of the two main characters, Peter from 'WM' and Fikara from 'DKM'. Drawing from close textual analysis, the traits are classified into eight psychological dimensions: Influence, Sociability, Empathy, Analysis, Creativity, Structure, Emotions, and Dynamism. The recorded frequencies indicate the number of times each trait is explicitly or implicitly expressed in the narrative, offering a quantifiable basis for comparing character depth, complexity, and thematic function within the two novels.

Table 2: Frequency of personality traits

SN	Character	Novel	Influence	Sociability	Empathy	Analysis	Creativity	Structure	Emotions	Dynamism	Total Traits %
1	Peter	WM	1	6	4	4	4	2	2	2	25 (62.5%)
2	Fikara	DKM	2	2	3	2	2	1	2	1	15 (37.5%)

Table 2 presents a frequency-based classification of personality traits as manifested through the actions, speech, and behavioural patterns of the two principal characters: Peter in Watoto wa

Mamant'ilie (WM) and Fikara in Daladala Kutoka Mbagala (DKM). The table offers an empirical overview of how character traits are distributed and emphasised, thereby illustrating the dimensions through which the authors construct and differentiate their protagonists.

Each trait frequency was determined through systematic coding of textual evidence. A single count was assigned whenever a trait was clearly demonstrated within a discrete narrative unit, defined as a specific action, spoken utterance, or narrated behavioural episode. Repeated references within the same episode were counted once to avoid inflation, while the recurrence of the same trait in separate scenes or interactions was counted cumulatively. For example, Sociability is equal to six (6), indicating six distinct instances across the text in which the character engages in socially oriented behaviour, such as cooperation, dialogue initiation, or group interaction. In contrast, influence one (1) reflects a single episode where the character explicitly directs or shapes others' actions.

Overall, Peter exhibits 25 traits (62.5% of the total), indicating a broader and more nuanced character construction. Sociability emerges as his dominant trait, followed by empathy, analytical thinking, and creativity. Although both characters express emotion equally, Fikara outperforms Peter in forceful behaviour, suggesting a more assertive but comparatively restricted narrative role. The greater recurrence of Peter's features in dimensions of sociability, empathy, analysis, and creativity shows that the author constructs Peter as a socially and emotionally intelligent character whose actions regularly demonstrate socio-cognitive understanding. His frequent sociability (6 times) indicates a common theme of relationship establishment or communal engagement, which reflects similar thematic concerns of 'WM', a novel he thinks places inside the urban or communal context, preoccupation with dialogue, cooperation, and understanding. These traits strongly correlate with Agreeableness and Openness to Experience (McCrae & Costa, 1997), qualities associated with emotional resiliency, faith, and imaginative engagement. The repetition of Peter's subject matter is subjected to both analysis and creativity, further supporting this interpretation: he is also helpful as a reflective and inventive figure, possibly emblematic of masculinity in postcolonial.

Fikara, on the other hand, sees nothing wrong with being functionally deferential but is generally much quieter, nearly mute. His characteristics are rarer and not equally distributed across the various categories. Empathy comes up three times, while sociability turns up as a concern only twice, suggesting the story gives him less space for interpersonal texture. His low frequency of creativity (2) and analysis (2) suggests a character less introspective or imaginative and more reactive or situationally bound. Indeed, Fikara's greater frequency of influence may reflect rare instances of assertion or abuse, perhaps a function of positional/situational power rather than persistent psychological strength. This is in line with Kegan (1982)'s subject-object development, where characters like Fikara can be read as people functioning in contexts in which roles are still externally defined, acting entities rather than autonomous subjects who have internalised values and connections between much that is in the environment.

This is confirmed by empirical analyses of characterisation in East African fiction. Kombe (2020), in the investigation of the post-Ujamaa urban novels, maintains that at the core of these narrative creative works, the central male character tends to be divided into two groups: the integrated (whether socially integrated) or integrated in terms of having moral consciousness on the one hand, and the disintegrated character caused by economic constraints, and collapse of institutions in Tanzanian cities. Peter is one of those, and he has always exhibited characteristics fitting in with social adjustment, love, and strategic discourse. Fikara represents the latter such character, one whose personality is more evident but less common, thereby

exhibiting the psychological repression and emotional constriction often associated with the representation of marginalised male subjects in Tanzanian urban storytelling.

In narratological terms, Peter is a “round” character dynamic, multilayered, capable of taking the reader by surprise, as Ndossa and Ismail (2023) would have put it. His ample displays of compassion, insight, and invention provide him with inner push and thematic importance. Fikara, on the other hand, is more “flat”, and we do not know much about their behaviour changes over time or interactions that demonstrate personal growth. This difference is not simply one of authorial intention but also highlights the distinct narrative functions of the characters. Peter is presumably a liaison between individuals through his continued and repeated expression of those few characteristics. Endemic Fikara's contributory traits are few, but strategically placed; they can symbolise resistance, societal paralysis, or structural critique.

Furthermore, the empirical basis of the table, which focuses on frequency rather than subjective judgment, situates the analysis in the concrete textual material. This aligns with corpus-driven stylistics, for example, Short and Leech (2007), who advocate quantitative measures of character traits as a complement to more qualitative character interpretations. It is also consistent with Hogan (2003) on the operation of a cognitive literary theory according to which the recognition and identification of characters is not a matter of depth but of repetition and salience within the reader's experience of the text.

In sum, the frequency-derived trait typology in Table 2 offers a provocative link for understanding character in the novels under study. Peter's frequency across a wider set of traits (across more dimensions) leaves him as a central, moral, and socially competent figure. In contrast, Fikara's low and focused pattern of traits leaves him to inhabit a character that works in a more confined narrative or socio-psychological space. This tension in character depiction mirrors broader thematic concerns about resilience, identity, and agency in recent Swahili fiction. It makes both literary and empirical contributions to character analysis in East African literature.

4.3 Character traits by psychoanalytic structure

Table 3 presents a psychoanalytic categorisation of the psychological forces shaping the behaviours and motivations of the characters Peter (in ‘WM’) and Fikara (in ‘DKM’). The structure is anchored on Sigmund Freud's structural model of the psyche: Id, Ego, and Superego. The Id represents instinctual drives such as hunger, frustration, or aggression; the Ego reflects rational decision-making and self-regulation, while the Superego embodies internalised moral standards and social expectations. This framework traces how each character's inner conflicts and choices are negotiated between biological impulses, rational self-control, and ethical or cultural obligations, thereby deepening the interpretation of their developmental and thematic roles within the narratives.

Table 5: Mapping traits according to Freud's Personality Structures

Character	Id (Instinctual)	Ego (Rational)	Superego (Moral/Social)
Peter	Hunger, frustration with poverty	Decision to stay in school, emotional control	Responsibility to family, aspiration for dignity
Fikara	Irritability, sleep resistance	Waking up early, school attendance	Obedience to mother, rejection of the drunk father's role

The Freudian holography of these characters' behaviours shows character development with differentiation, determined by different degrees of psychological integration. For Peter, the Id is expressed in instinctive reactions to poverty and hunger, a theme common among many other urban youth protagonists in East African fiction. However, such barbaric compulsion is contained by a healthy Ego in his comparably rational choice to continue attending school and keep his emotional impulses in check. His Superego is also strong, with strong moral and social obligations; family duty takes precedence, and dignity is an interest. This balance of the triad reflects a character who, while exposed to challenging social or economic conditions, has also demonstrably developed cognitive maturation and internalised moral values. Freud (1923) suggested that a well-developed Superego results from successful internalisation of parental and social standards, such as in Peter's compulsion to be responsible and self-reflective. His inner balance is coextensive with what Kegan (1982) calls self-authoring consciousness, where people do not just obey or react but act from a synthesised moral self.

Fikara, on the other hand, has a more reactive psyche. His Id is irritable and resists routine (such as sleep), which marks an unresolvable tension between desire and duty. His Ego is seen in behaviours imposed from the outside, such as waking up early and going to school, behaviours that imply fitting in rather than moving out. However, Fikara's Superego is less developed, even though it exists. His ethical behaviour, obeying his mother and refusing his belligerently drunk father, is externally motivated, consistent with what Kohlberg (1969) terms "conventional morality," in which right and wrong are guided by social sanction, not internalised moral reasoning. This incomplete Superego development reflects a psyche that is still in the process of negotiation, imbued with independence, a condition akin to the fragmented male subjectivities Kombe (2020) notices in Tanzanian urban fiction, where young boys struggle to become subjects over and against unreliable paternal figures and socioeconomic restrictions.

These findings are corroborated by empirical research on youth identity in post-colonial African literature. Mlama (1999) notes that lead male characters in Tanzanian realist narratives are typically caught in a cycle of inherited trauma and emergent responsibility. Peter embodies the former of these two approaches: a protagonist learning to discipline himself out of his homeless privations and divine aspirations; Fikara represents the death-and-birth experience for the willed order of the young adult, in the world between ontological and imposed chaos. Moreover, Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) highlight the relevance of internal alignment (i.e., the congruence between thought, emotion, and action) in the development of mature personality. Peter's personality is characterised by this unified portrayal; Fikara's seems more reactive and extrinsic, with a narrative intention to convey socio-psychological struggle.

In general, this psychoanalytic interpretation underscores the narrative imbalance between the two characters: Peter epitomises a solid and ethical identity, but Fikara enacts the struggle between instinct, compulsion, and a developing, tenuous sense of right and wrong. The Freudian model not only explains the psychology of the characters but also provides insight into how individual agency and moral growth are represented in the social and cultural spheres of modern Tanzanian fiction.

5 Discussion

This study set out to address a gap in Tanzanian/Swahili literary scholarship by examining how characterisation functions not merely as a descriptive tool but as a theoretical site where psychological depth and social critique intersect. By analysing WM by Emmanuel Mbogo and DKM by Mussa Shakinyashi through Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory and Puckett's Narrative Theory, the findings demonstrate that character construction in these plays operates as a

culturally embedded strategy for interpreting social realities. Rather than treating characters as passive reflections of material conditions, the texts present them as dynamic agents whose inner conflicts and emotional expressions articulate broader structural tensions.

The synthesis of psychoanalytic and narrative perspectives reveals that characters' behaviours, silences, and emotional excesses are not incidental but narratively purposeful. Freud's framework clarifies how unconscious anxieties and suppressed desires shape characters' decisions, enabling the plays to dramatise social pressures as internal struggles. Puckett's narrative approach, in turn, shows how plot progression, focalisation, and dialogue guide readers towards ethical and emotional alignment with these figures. Together, these theories illuminate how Tanzanian dramatists transform individual subjectivity into a medium for collective commentary.

For theory, these findings suggest that psychoanalytic and narrative models gain renewed relevance when situated within African and Swahili cultural contexts. The plays challenge universalist applications of Western theory by demonstrating how psychological processes are mediated through communal values, family structures, and historical experience. Characterisation thus emerges as a bridge between the private psyche and public life, expanding literary theory's capacity to account for culturally specific forms of meaning-making.

For Tanzanian and Swahili literature, the implications are equally significant. Mbogo and Shakinyashi reaffirm character as a central aesthetic and ideological resource through which writers interrogate identity, social belonging, and moral responsibility. Their works contribute to a tradition in which storytelling functions as social memory and critique, inviting audiences to reflect on inherited conditions while imagining alternative futures. By foregrounding characterisation as a key analytical lens, this study responds directly to the research aim of rethinking how Swahili texts encode social experience, thereby positioning Tanzanian drama as a vital contributor to both regional literary discourse and broader theoretical debates.

This study addresses a critical gap in Tanzanian and Swahili literary criticism by foregrounding characterisation as a primary site for analysing the interaction between psychological depth and social structures. Rather than treating characters as symbolic figures, the findings demonstrate that protagonists are constructed as active agents whose self-awareness and ethical judgement shape narrative meaning. Their actions and reflections reveal how identity is formed within specific historical and communal settings, thereby linking individual experience to wider social processes.

From a theoretical perspective, the analysis advances literary scholarship by demonstrating how character agency can be examined productively through psycho-social and narrative lenses. The protagonists' complex inner lives challenge reductive readings that flatten African characters into static types. Instead, their analytical thought, moral reasoning, and emotional responsiveness position characterisation as a dynamic narrative strategy that mediates between personal consciousness and collective concerns. This contributes to theory by illustrating how psychological realism in African texts functions as a mode of social critique rather than mere introspection.

For Tanzanian and Swahili literature, these findings underscore the role of fiction as an intervention in dominant cultural representations. By crafting characters who confront inequality, limited access to education, and ethical injustice, the authors extend Swahili narrative traditions that privilege moral inquiry and social engagement. The careful use of dialogue, behaviour, and linguistic choice enables readers to apprehend both inner motivation and outward action, reinforcing literature's capacity to generate empathy and critical awareness.

In this way, the study reaffirms the significance of character-centred analysis in understanding how Swahili texts articulate lived realities and challenge marginalising discourses, directly fulfilling the research aim of re-evaluating characterisation as a central analytical framework. This is illustrated as follows.

Wote ambao hamjalipa ada na hamna sare, hakuna shule! Nisizione sura zenu bila ada na sare (No school for all of you have not paid fees and do not have uniforms! I do not want to see your faces without fees and uniforms) (Mbogo, 2002, p. 1)

The excerpt above is the beginning of the narrative, which introduces early contention in the life of the main character, Peter. He is facing a school-expulsion letter from his headteacher at Mapepela Primary School - an instruction for all pupils, but one that carries particularly dire consequences for him.

This episode is central to the study's aim of addressing the limited critical attention given to characterisation as a mechanism through which Tanzanian fiction negotiates psychological subjectivity and social structure. Peter's expulsion from school functions less as a plot incident than as an entry point into his interior world, allowing readers to apprehend how institutional practices shape self-perception and aspiration. Education is framed not simply as schooling, but as an imagined pathway to social mobility, and its withdrawal becomes emblematic of structurally constrained futures.

From a theoretical perspective, the episode demonstrates the effectiveness of implicit characterisation in revealing psychological depth. Rather than relying on overt authorial commentary, Mbogo constructs Peter's inner life through circumstance, silence, and emotional response. This supports narrative theory's claim that character is produced through situation and progression, while also aligning with psycho-social approaches that view subjectivity as formed through repeated encounters with exclusion. The analysis thus contributes to theory by showing how African narratives integrate psychological realism into socially grounded storytelling.

For Tanzanian and Swahili literature, these findings reaffirm the novel's role as a space for interrogating lived experience within urban contexts. Peter's family background and school exclusion situate his development within recognisable social arrangements, reinforcing the literature's capacity to expose how institutions shape personality. Importantly, this mode of character construction resists simplistic moralisation, instead inviting readers to consider how individual trajectories are embedded in wider systems. By foregrounding characterisation as an analytical lens, the study directly addresses the research gap, demonstrating that Tanzanian fiction offers sophisticated models for examining identity formation that warrant sustained theoretical engagement.

The moment is echoed again in the quote,

Zita Lomolomo, darasa la sita, na Peter Lomolomo, darasa la tano, walikumbwa na tangazo la mwalimu Chikonya... (Zita Lomolomo, in standard six, and Peter Lomolomo, in standard five, were affected by Teacher Chikonya's announcement) (Mbogo, 2002, p. 1).

Peter's psychology is revealed indirectly through his behaviour and experiences of exclusion, conveying a profound sense of loss. However, his upbringing also discloses resilience and inner strength. Mbogo avoids portraying Peter as a passive victim, instead presenting him as an inheritor of survival and one who adapts resourcefully to hardship. This positioning of character

is reminiscent of Nyairo's (2023) observations that post-2010 Swahili fiction increasingly drives narratives through the complex inner lives of characters formed around precarity.

This passage from page 14 brings Peter's world into focus: a home characterised by hunger, work, and fear. The quotation "...*Jambo hili lilikuwa lina msumbua akili Peter. Kuna siku halali. Kuna siku hushinda njaa...*" (This thing troubled Peter's mind. Some days he wouldn't sleep through the night. Some other days, he would fast for the entire day. ...) (Mbogo, 2002, p. 14) and reveals how his inner torment is expressed in physical signs and emotional anguish. This psychological insight is shared by Freud in his theory of unconscious anxiety and repression (Freud, 1890), which examines how lack pervades one's behaviour and personal development.

Mbogo also employs music and soundscape as a delicate means of characterisation. We see Peter listening to a street musician, "*Wamo, Eee! Ndi-ndi-ndilili...*" (Mbogo, 2002, pp. 14-16), which collectively represents his yearning for liberation and articulation. Music becomes a peephole into the heart and mind of Peter, working as a literary shortcut to characterise a state of mind. This emerges in dialogue with recent work by Smith (2021), who claims that music in African novels mediates suffering and subjectivity, enabling characters to express affect outside of direct retelling.

Shekinyashi uses the same tools of the trade to build the character of Fikara on 'DKM'. Shekinyashi's focus on the mundane discussions like the verbal abuse Fikara has to withstand "*Nilishakuambia tayari, Sitaki kukuona tena hapa kwangu...*" (I told you already, I do not want to see you here at my place again...). In this, Mbogo (2002, p. 4) exposes her reality and how this has implications for attributes such as emotional resilience and frustration. Instead of simply defining her through suffering, the writer presents her as morally aware and resourceful, with which she cobbles some identity together, corresponding to Ogude's (2022) "narrative dignity, which suggests that African victims remain agents in situations of violence."

The extract "*Mama hawezi kuniacha mwenyewe, usiku kwenye nyumba ..*" (Mother would not dare leave me alone, at night in the hut...) (Mbogo, 2002, p. 8) depicts Fikara's environment as full of uncertainties and menacing. Moreover, the fear of rape and theft is not speculative but an everyday negotiation; it informs Fikara's inhibitions and spatial awareness. These imprecise signs of personality analogise indirectly with characterisation (Mambrol, 2022), as indirect characterisation through setting and context can let readers infer what, if anything, goes on in social life psychologically.

Fikara's bleary morning routine is no less revealing. The extract "*Fikara, amka mwanangu... Nilijisikia hasira ya hali ya juu...*" (Fikara, wake up my child... I felt an intense rage...) (Mbogo, 2002, p. 1) illustrates the emotional strain of balancing education and economic hardship. Her irritability and exhaustion do not indicate weakness but reflect an overburdened psychological state. These findings directly address the study's aim of re-evaluating characterisation as a critical lens through which Tanzanian and Swahili fiction articulates psychological subjectivity and social critique. The analysis demonstrates that indirect cues, such as bodily exhaustion, habitual actions, and shifts in mood, are not incidental details but narrative strategies that encode personality over time. In line with Webb's argument, such cues enable readers to infer interior states without reliance on explicit exposition, thereby expanding the theoretical understanding of how character is constructed in prose fiction.

The character of Fikara exemplifies this complexity. Shekinyashi's use of interaction, routine, and internal response produces a figure who exceeds passive suffering and instead embodies ambition, contradiction, and cultural negotiation. Theoretical approaches to character benefit

from this portrayal by illustrating how psychological development can function as a site where gendered and classed tensions are narratively negotiated. Characterisation here operates as a mediating structure, translating social pressures into personal consciousness while sustaining narrative empathy.

Across both texts, the combined use of direct description and indirect techniques underscores prose fiction's capacity for nuanced psychological representation. Rather than serving decorative purposes, these methods align narrative form with critical intent. When read through psychoanalytic and narratological frameworks, the protagonists' inner conflicts emerge as historically and socially produced, challenging universalist models of personality in literary theory.

For Tanzanian and Swahili literature, these findings reaffirm the genre's contribution to African literary studies by demonstrating how local narratives deploy sophisticated character strategies to interrogate social organisation. By foregrounding characterisation as a primary analytical focus, the study fills a gap in existing scholarship and positions Swahili fiction as a vital space for theorising identity, agency, and social experience.

6 Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates that Peter and Fikara are constructed as psychologically complex protagonists whose personality traits emerge through sustained interaction between their inner lives and social circumstances. Peter is characterised by sensitivity, introspection, and a strong aspirational drive. His reactions to exclusion and institutional rejection reveal a reflective disposition marked by emotional vulnerability and moral awareness. He internalises external pressures deeply, which shapes a personality inclined towards self-examination and quiet endurance rather than overt defiance. His development shows how aspiration, anxiety, and ethical resolve coexist, producing a character whose identity is formed through contemplation and gradual adjustment to constraint. Fikara, by contrast, is defined by assertiveness, emotional intelligence, and a pronounced sense of self-direction. Her thoughts and actions reveal a personality that actively negotiates tension rather than absorbing it inwardly. She demonstrates analytical judgement, strategic adaptability, and a capacity to engage critically with her environment. Unlike Peter's inward orientation, Fikara's traits are expressed through interaction, decision-making, and relational awareness, positioning her as a figure who confronts limitation through agency and negotiation. Taken together, the analysis shows that both characters possess emotional depth and self-awareness, yet differ in how these qualities are expressed. Peter's personality is shaped through introspection and endurance, while Fikara's is articulated through action and engagement. The findings thus answer the central question by revealing that Mbogo and Shekinyashi construct distinct yet equally credible personalities, using characterisation to show how individual traits are formed, tested, and refined within specific social realities.

7 References

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